

■ American Indian and Alaska Native Programs

The Director of Native American Programs, located in the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations, is USDA's primary contact with tribal governments and their members. The director serves as the principal adviser and representative on all matters related to USDA policy and programs which benefit and affect American Indians and Alaska Natives. The director also chairs USDA's Native American Working Group, which reports to the Secretary and provides advice, sup-

port, and other assistance to the director. In 1992, USDA adopted an American Indian and Alaska Native policy which guides USDA's interactions with Native Americans.

USDA provides a wide range of services to American Indian and Alaska Native communities. In recent years, the Department has reached out to advise American Indians and Alaska Natives about USDA services available to them, to deliver programs more effectively to Indian tribes, and to initiate new programs in response to the needs of tribes. Following are highlights of recent agency activities and programs in USDA mission areas which serve Indian tribes and their members.

Natural Resources and Environment

Several USDA agencies—including the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as the lead agency, the Farm Service Agency (FSA), the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS)—are implementing an extensive 2-year joint outreach effort with the Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) to heighten awareness of USDA services available to American Indian and Alaska Native communities. With 65 member tribes, the IAC is a nonprofit corporation devoted to improving agriculture as a source of economic development for Indian people. NRCS has designated a full-time American Indian Liaison in order to work more closely with the IAC. NRCS has worked with the IAC to help tribes establish 33 full-time and 73 part time NRCS offices at tribal headquarters and 15 American Indian Conservation Districts under tribal law, with an additional 2 Districts in the development phase. NRCS has conducted 20 “Working Effectively with American Indians” workshops which focus on historical, legal, and cultural issues that are significant for effective program delivery to Native Americans.

The Forest Service has an American Indian and Alaska Native policy referred to as Forest Service American Indian/Alaska Native Policy—Friends and Partners. The Forest Service has also published a national tribal resource book entitled *Forest Service National Resource Book on American Indian and Alaska Native Relations* to promote cooperative relations with Indian tribes and Alaska Natives. The Forest Service works with Indian tribes to coordinate the management of National Forest lands and resources with adjacent Indian tribes; to honor Indian water rights and reserved rights to hunt, fish, gather, and graze on present-day National Forests through consultation and agreement with affected Indian tribes; to engage in ongoing consultation with tribes to accommodate traditional, cultural sites on public lands; and to provide research, technology transfer, and technical assistance to tribes.

Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services

Much of the 54 million acres of Indian land is cropland and grazing land that the U.S. Government holds in trust for Indian people. USDA is working more aggressively to help tribes and individual Indian farmers realize the agricultural potential of their landholdings. In order to increase farm services to tribes, FSA is conducting a formal outreach campaign with other USDA agencies and the IAC to host meetings and presentations at reservation sites. The communication campaign helps tribal staff and Indian farmers become more familiar with the current array of farm crop, conservation, financial credit, and crop insurance programs, as well as the farm program

changes resulting from the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (the 1996 Act).

FSA also provides services at suboffices established on reservations. FSA is cooperating with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to increase tribal participation in USDA farm programs. In 1996, USDA and the BIA worked together to ensure that Indian lands had the full opportunity to be enrolled in production flexibility contracts authorized by the 1996 Act. The two agencies are continuing to help tribes establish conservation practices on reservation land and resolve the credit problems of individual Indian farmers. FSA also administers the Indian Tribal Land Acquisition Program, which provides long term loans to Indian Tribes to acquire land within their reservations.

Rural Development

USDA's Rural Development programs are administered through three rural development services: the Rural Business-Cooperative Service (RBS), the Rural Housing Service (RHS), and the Rural Utilities Service (RUS). The eligibility requirements vary according to each program.

Increased emphasis has been placed on economic and rural development activities and programs on reservations. RBS, RHS, and RUS have increased their investments in tribal water and waste, community facilities, and business projects. Rural Development has established Native American Program Coordinators in most of the States with significant American Indian populations.

RHS is striving to expand its role in financing needed housing on tribal lands. In conjunction with the President's Home Ownership Initiative, RHS identified barriers to delivery of the Section 502 Direct Single Family Housing Loan Program on reservation trust lands and developed recommendations to resolve these barriers and increase home ownership of tribal members living on trust lands. The RHS Native American pilot loan program was designed to meet the home ownership needs of Native Americans residing on trust lands. Under the pilot, 25 tribes will work in partnership with USDA and Fannie Mae to assist tribal members to obtain guaranteed Section 502 housing loans for homes on these reservations.

RHS developed a handbook for Rural Development staff regarding lending on tribal lands in order to better serve tribal customers.

Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services

The Food and Consumer Service (FCS) administers the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), which is offered in lieu of food stamps. In FY 1996, an estimated 120,000 American Indian and Alaska Native participants received FDPIR food packages, and FCS distributed food valued at an estimated \$51.3 million to Native American households through FDPIR. About 125,000 other Native American households receive food stamps each month. FCS is undertaking a FDPIR food package review, in full partnership with Indian cooperators. FCS has established a pilot project under which fresh produce is made available to tribes participating in FDPIR. The FCS Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) developed a new packet of materials to increase awareness of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) among American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Research, Education, and Economics

The Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) administers the Extension Indian Reservation Program, which provides extension agents to selected Indian tribes. The extension agents conduct education programs on reservations in response to tribally identified needs. CSREES also has an endowment fund for the 29 Tribal Colleges designated as 1994 land-grant institutions under P.L. 103-382. Interest earned is distributed to these institutions to facilitate teaching programs in the food and agricultural sciences. The Tribal Colleges Education Equity Grants Program provides a \$50,000 award to each of the 29 designated 1994 land-grant institutions to strengthen instruction programs in the food and agricultural sciences.

The Extension Services at the 1994 Institutions program provide competitive grants to address a wide range of agricultural issues, including crop and animal production, farm business management, marketing techniques, decisionmaking skills, and environmental considerations. This program can also be used to enhance community resource and economic development; family development and resource management; 4-H and youth development; leadership and volunteer development; natural resources and environment; and nutrition, diet, and health.

Since 1991 the Children, Youth, and Families at Risk Initiative, supported by CSREES, has provided funding and technical support to Native American and other underserved populations for a broad spectrum of prevention-oriented education programs to strengthen individuals and families with children, prenatal to late teens. The goal of this national initiative is to empower the whole family to enable those at risk to develop necessary life skills and become strong, productive adults.

Marketing and Regulatory Programs

The Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has ongoing programs with Indian tribes that generally focus on agricultural, natural resource, facility, or human health and safety protection. Examples include the vaccination of dogs and livestock on reservations by Veterinary Services, control of noxious weeds and grasshoppers on several reservations, and protection of sheep and cattle from excessive loss to predators. As mentioned above, APHIS has joined other USDA agencies to fund an outreach program with the Intertribal Agriculture Council to tribes. APHIS has chartered a Native American Working Group within the Agency and has a World Wide Web page on this topic. The address is <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/anawg/amerind.html>

Food Safety

The Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), in coordination with the Intertribal Basin Council and USDA's Rural Business-Cooperative Service, provides design expertise, approval, and funding for mobile livestock slaughtering units to be used on reservations. In addition, the Emergency Programs Office offers expertise in planning and training for Tribal and State Radiological Emergency Preparedness programs.